

AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
BETHESDA HOME;

CONTAINING THE NARRATIVE OF ITS ORIGIN AND
OF ITS PROGRESS TO THE PRESENT TIME.

January 1st, 1862.

PRICE TEN CENTS.

PHILADELPHIA:
FROM BRYSON'S PRINTING ROOMS, 2 NORTH SIXTH STREET.

1862.

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE BETHESDA HOME.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; and verily thou shalt be fed."

An account of the Bethesda Home would be incomplete and unsatisfactory without some information concerning the conception of the work, and the motives and experiences which gave rise to it.

In the year 1851, a lady of Quaker parentage, but who had somewhat departed from the simplicity and plainness of her ancestors, became conscious of sin, and realized a desire to lead a new life. She sought and found the Saviour, and united with the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was this sister whom God chose as the instrument to accomplish the work carried on by the Bethesda Home. To ascertain the steps which led to this house of faith, it will be necessary to consult her own private narrative of God's dealings with her heart.

In 1854, three years after her conversion, Annie Clement was appointed to take charge of a class connected with a missionary church in Eleventh street, in the southern part of Philadelphia. The duties of this work called her to visit families at their homes, and she was thus brought in contact with much destitution and distress, which most abound in this section of the city. Her means were freely distributed to lighten the miseries of the poor, but she labored and prayed chiefly for the salvation of their souls. She found how much deception was practiced upon the benevolent; how money, clothing, and even food were frequently exchanged for intoxicating liquors. Many would rather beg than work, and would use their children as means to rouse the sympathies of the humane; and then squander what was given for relief, for that which only rendered their misery more miserable, and sunk them deeper in poverty and degradation. The care of children was laid as a burden upon her heart, and she felt the necessity of a house where they might be separated from such degrading influences, and trained to a religious life. Bearing this burden continually in her prayers, she soon felt assured that, sooner or later, God would provide her such a place; but when, or where, or how, she could not tell. She also conceived

the idea that a House of Industry could be carried on in such a manner as greatly to improve the condition of those old enough and able to work ; that many young girls might be saved from degradation and shame, and trained to lead an industrious and virtuous lives, if separated from evil influencees, eared for and brought into a cheerful and religious home, where they could be taught to work, and their labor so systematized as to insure profitable returns for their industry; that women with drunken husbands, who sat nursing their children in rags and dirt, could be persuaded to leave off their begging, and come into such a house, where they could learn to earn a living and keep themselves decent.

At this time, the Holy Spirit was preparing her heart for a life of faith, which should receive temporal things from the hand of God, as directly as spiritual necessities are supplied. One text was so strongly and constantly impressed on her mind that she firmly believed sometime she would be compelled to render a literal obedience. It was, "Sell that ye have, and give alms," and almost without a struggle her heart said, "Amen!" Her own language, in view of this, was, "Lord, I am willing: I can trust Thee for all things. I know nothing is impossible with God, and all things are possible to him that believeth. I know that to be used by God in any way, the eye must be single, the life humble, and nothing sought but the glory of God. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;' but those in whom the words of Jesus abide shall ask what they will, and it shall be done unto them."

During the years 1856,'7 and '8, the subject of the two establishments was continually borne before God in prayer ; and she was looking every day of the year for a way to be opened, through whieh they might go into operation ; and continually she felt the answer given, that in due time the work should be accomplished. Many preeious promises, which sustained her faith in patient waiting, given from time to time, as the Lord's will concerning the work. "The Almighty shall be thy defence—thou shalt have plenty of silver—thou shalt deereee a thing and it shall be established unto thee, and light shall shine upon thy ways." The fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah seemed very clearly to point to the work: "For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not, lengthen thy eords, and strengthen thy stakes. Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed ; neither

be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame. In righteousness shalt thou be established," &c.

Continually she was inquiring of the Lord how she could serve the poor in a way that would promote their good and be acceptable to Him. She gave so freely of her own means that she had every reason to believe they would soon be exhausted; but in view of the proposed institution she felt no fears. She knew the money would be furnished when the time came to act. He who brought up a fish to take from its mouth money for tribute, could turn the dust into gold, if necessary to carry on his own work.

For several years Miss CLEMENT had been engaged in a large, fashionable and lucrative business. It was both "transient and commission," and the most profitable branch consisted in large orders received from the South and West. Immediately previous to the panic of 1857 and '8, an unusually large amount of business had been done; her liabilities were great, and it would be impossible to meet them, unless her own debtors were prompt in payment. This distressed her for a time; but, laying the matter before her heavenly Father in prayer, she received an assurance that she would be able to collect all moneys due her, in time to make her own payments. And so the event proved. Her faith was not put to confusion; she was able to meet every payment.

But this time of trial led her to consider much the passage, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another." It was indeed as though the voice of God spoke distinctly to her ear. To his command, once recognized, she could only give unshrinking obedience; and immediately resolved from this time to do business on no other than the cash principle. There was some perplexity as to the manner in which this could be accomplished; and it would necessarily very greatly curtail her operations. Praying for direction, and believing that to him who lacked wisdom it should be given liberally, if asked for in faith, without wavering, a plan was presented which was immediately put into execution. She wrote to her principal customers that henceforth no orders would be received unless prepaid, and all moneys due were collected as speedily as possible. Could she have foreseen the difficulties that were coming upon the country, a more prudent course could not have been pursued. Three months after her affairs were settled on this principle, the war broke out, and cut off all communication with the South and West. This arrangement also made it easy to withdraw from business and devote herself entirely to the cause to which she felt God had called her.

Her charities had been large, and when her affairs were settled up, she found herself without any capital, excepting the house in which she lived, and it was partially mortgaged; and for it a tenant was now found.

Some fifteen or eighteen months previous to the closing up of Miss Clement's business, she wrote to a friend, then residing in Trenton, a devoted Christian lady, who being free from domestic cares was consecrating all her time and talents to doing good as she found opportunity, to inquire if she was willing to take charge of such an institution as was proposed until such time as her own way should be opened to reside in it. After much prayer and deliberation, this friend consented to Miss Clement's proposition to become a co-laborer in this effort to do good.

In the month of October, 1859, it appeared to our sister's mind that it would not be going before the Lord's time to take a house in which one or the other of the objects she had in view would be carried out. Almost immediately after coming to this decision, a person of her acquaintance wished to open a store at the corner of Thirteenth and Ellsworth streets, and let out the upper part of the building. In some respects it was well adapted for her purposes, although there were some inconveniences. Being a corner house, there was a great deal of front; the yard was small, and there was no bath, and only one small room on the first floor, to be used by the occupants of the house. It was a four storied building, with three rooms on a floor, well arranged and ventilated, with high ceilings and many windows. This house was taken, trusting in God to send both inmates and support.

At first all the rooms were not appropriated to the institution; some were let out for a time to poor, respectable women; but as the family increased, and rooms were vacated, they were gradually occupied. Just at this time, another Christian friend called on Miss Clement, whom she believed to be fitted for carrying out a work of faith; and finding her disengaged, she told her of the proposed work, and asked if she was willing to assist the lady previously mentioned in conducting the house, as Miss Clement's business would not yet permit her to engage in the work personally. This sister also consented; and on the third of November they took up their abode at the Home. An extract from Miss Clement's diary about this time will best show the faith which animated the spirits of those engaged in this enterprise:

"The House now to be commenced stands founded upon a rock; that rock is Christ. It rests upon the power and word of

God. The eternal triune Jehovah bears it in his hands, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it."

It was the determination to carry out the principle of faith in God in the most minute particulars. It was resolved never to ask help from any human being, nor to make their wants known to any, save God; believing that he who owns the cattle upon a thousand hills, and opened springs of water to famishing Hager and Ishmael, would be mindful of his children's cry, and not suffer them to want. He feeds the young ravens, and clothes the lilies of the field, and shall he not supply the wants of his own children? In the language of one of the sisters who first went to reside at the Home, "We had counted the cost, and had taken into the account privations, hardships, trials, and persecutions—being willing to suffer all these, if we might only have the assurance that we were pleasing God, and laboring for the good of our fellow-creatures in the way he should appoint. We felt our Saviour was with us, and spent much time in prayer and looking to Him concerning our work."

For three weeks there was no increase of family; but on the twenty-third of November, a deformed girl was brought from Trenton, by a lady who knew of the work, and was deeply interested in it. The second of December, the same lady brought another girl, whom she wished to rescue from evil influences, and whose mother was very depraved. On the thirteenth, a sick woman was received, for whom it seemed difficult to find any other suitable place. She seemed to be near death, and yet without a sense of pardoning mercy, but earnestly desiring to make her peace with God. On Saturday morning, rather less than a week after her arrival at the Home, although work was pressing, time was found to engage with her in prayer; and she was delivered from the bondage of Satan, and rejoiced in the liberty wherewith Christ had made her free. She maintained her faith steadfast until God took her to himself, on the eighth of the following February.

December 19th. Three more girls were received, and in February and March three or four others. They now commenced to take in sewing, and the expenses were partially defrayed by the proceeds of the work done in the house. An evening school was also opened for these girls, and great efforts were made to give them a love for religion, and in some cases with success.

In April, 1860, an old woman, very much crippled, was received into the Home, with her daughter, who assisted in the work of the house. She lived until October, rejoicing that a comfortable home among God's people had been provided for her in her last days. In the summer, some smaller children were

taken into the house, and the larger girls left, some having found places to work, others returning to their friends. During the winter, in the visits that were frequently made among the poor in the neighborhood, by some of the inmates of the Home, cases of extreme destitution and suffering were frequently met with. Many mothers with young children seemed peculiar objects of pity and sympathy. Some of these were taken to the Home, under the impression that there was an institution for infants established in the city, to which the children could be sent when their mothers found places to work out. But, upon inquiry, this proved to be a Children's Hospital, unavailable to any but the sick, and it was ascertained that there was no provision made for children under three years of age. The ladies in charge of the Home regarded these circumstances in which they were now placed as indicating the path which Providence had assigned them, and immediately devoted themselves to the care of young children.

The family now rapidly increased. As far as possible they kept the mothers with the children, especially at night, until such time as they could be weaned gradually and with safety. But much unlooked-for difficulty was here experienced from the ignorance and neglect of the mothers. Sometimes a mother would bring her child and leave it, while she went to look for work, promising to return again in the evening, and would not be back for several days. Others seemed to really forget the wants of their infants, until driven to seek them by their own physical suffering. As a matter of necessity, sudden weaning and irregular nursing produced much sickness. Sometimes children would be brought who had never eaten any thing but bread and water; others again, though but a few months old, had been fed with any coarse and solid food eaten by the mother. The change to a simple and nourishing diet was almost invariably attended with more or less illness, and sometimes death. The care of these children and the management of their ignorant mothers, was no light work.

During the first year, donations were very few. Publicity had not entered into any of their calculations, and the Bethesda Home was not known beyond the circle of the personal acquaintances of its originators. Much of the expense of the establishment was borne by Miss Clement herself; but there was enough received from other sources to assure those who were laboring that the work was acceptable to God, and that he was pleased to have them go to Him with all their wants, instead of soliciting donations through human agency.

The first donation received was three dollars, from a lady who had heard incidentally of the work, and believed it to be of God. Besides this, during the first month, was received on the 14th, fifty-five cents; 21st, twenty-four cents; 28th, five dollars, and on the 30th, five dollars. In December but one dollar was given; in January, two dollars; in February, fifty cents; in March, eight dollars and seventy-five cents; and also five dollars was deducted from a bill by a gentleman who was not known to have any knowledge of the work designed to be accomplished by the institution, and it was with very peculiar feelings of gratitude that this unlooked-for aid was received. One month of this year no donation is recorded, and another time as much as thirteen dollars were given. But whether the support was liberal or meagre, our sisters still maintained their trust in the Lord, and went on doing good, and the promise was literally fulfilled to them, "and verily thou shalt be fed:" they were not suffered to want for one meal. In November, one year after the commencement of this work of faith, twenty-five dollars from the Dawson fund were obtained for them by one of their friends.

It was at the close of this year that Miss Clement felt it to be her duty to close her business, and knew she would not be able to supply the wants of the Home as heretofore, as all moneys she could collect would be required to meet her own engagements. Some passages in the diary of 1861 are of peculiar interest:—

"January 10th. Treasury empty, and no prospect of being sustained. A very dark day, and faith has been severely tested; but God has not forgotten to be gracious. In the evening, three separate donations came in, amounting to four dollars; also a basket of provisions."

"January 11th. One dollar, and two pounds of butter."

"January 24th. This morning our closets and purses were empty. We ate our breakfast, not knowing where dinner was to come from, and a sick person of delicate appetite must be provided for. A severe storm was raging, and few persons would like to venture out on such a day. At ten o'clock A. M. a carriage stopped at the door, and a delicate female came in, bringing a large basket of all kinds of provisions, needed for our dinner, and leaving ten dollars. She said she had been so impressed to bring these things this morning that she could not rest. Her brother-in-law had thought it too stormy for the horses to go out, and she had determined to come in the cars, when he concluded to send the carriage. A few days after, when in perplexity about dinner for the sick, the same lady brought just what was needed."

"January 28th. Received one ton of coal."

"March 5th. A family numbering twenty. Our need very great—our treasury very low. A gentleman called and gave five dollars."

"March 7th. Many things were needed in the house which seemed to be indispensable, and no way seemed opened to procure them. We cried unto God in our extremity, and soon after three young ladies came in, who gave five dollars, which relieved our immediate necessities."

"Thus God manifested himself in deliverances from pressing need, when into no ear but his were poured our complaints, and from no human hand was succor sought."

"March 26th. For several days God had withheld his hand to such an extent as to cause great depression. We met together and made special request of God, that if he was indeed pleased with our work, and it was his will it should continue, he would come to our aid on that particular day. About an hour afterward, a lady who had never been to the house before, called and left five dollars." The result of this lady's visit proved to be of a peculiarly providential character, as she has exerted her influence in bringing our Home to the notice of those who have often contributed to our necessities.

"March 29th. Received fifteen dollars."

"April 2d. A clergyman who had taken much interest in some little motherless twins of whom we had taken charge, left twenty dollars. During this month the Lord gave us gracious assurance that he remembered and was pleased with our petitions. We received in all sixty dollars and fifty cents. In May our receipts were thirty-three dollars."

There had been received into the care of the Home, up to this time, fifty-one children, and for some months past very serious inconvenience had been felt for want of room, and also from having but one apartment on the first floor; and no bath-room, nor hydrants through the house. The care of infants was therefore particularly laborious. This, with all other wants, was brought to the ear of Jesus, with the firm persuasion that he who taught the birds of the air to make their nests, would in his own good time provide a suitable house for this family.

In the early part of May, while on a visit of a few days to a friend at Chestnut Hill, a large and commodious house was offered to Miss Clement, for rent. So greatly had the need been felt that the petition was constantly borne in mind, and all through the visit hearts were uplifted that God would provide. In the forenoon of the day of her departure, suddenly the burden of prayer was removed, and an assurance given that a house was

provided, and would be speedily presented. In a few moments after, the lady of the house expressed a wish that when she removed which it was intended to do immediately, the building might be rented for some religious institution, for which it seemed particularly adapted. The rent, six hundred dollars a year, seemed very high; but the location was desirable. In a situation celebrated for its salubrity, a garden already planted with vegetables for the ensuing summer, an orchard, and several acres of ground attached—all rendered it a very suitable place for such a family. In a few days arrangements were completed, and the inmates of Bethesda Home prepared to remove on the first of June. At this time, Miss Clement, having freed herself from all business engagements, took up her residence at the house.

A kind and watchful Providence was manifested in their removal, as in everything else concerning them. A gentleman who had already done much for the institution, bore the expenses of removal; and the heart of a lady, a member of the Society of Friends, was moved to give the children a feast upon their arrival at their new home. She came out from the city, bringing with her a quantity of provisions and refreshments, and also ten dollars, to be appropriated to the rent. Just at this time, sixty dollars, the amount of a bill owing in Kentucky, was received by Miss Clement, which afforded a little capital with which to furnish the house. The family removing, also left several extremely useful and important articles of furniture for their use. Ten dollars were given in the early part of this month for the rent of the house in the city, and five dollars more for the rent of the new house.

June 22d. "We have been three weeks in our new home, and, until to-day, nothing has transpired to indicate that any interest was felt in our work by the residents of the neighborhood. Our little sum of money was entirely consumed; the last flour in the house was baked and put into the closet, but as it left our hands, the assurance was given that relief had already been prepared for us. We were as well assured of it as if it were already in our possession. As we sat down to the tea-table, a lady residing at the Hill called, looked through the house, manifested great interest in the children, and left a donation of twenty dollars."

"June 24th. A lady of Chestnut Hill gave five dollars. On the 26th, a gentleman visited the house, expressed much interest in the work, spoke approvingly of the household arrangements and the appearance of the children, and gave forty dollars; a

lady accompanying him also left five dollars. Amount received in June, one hundred and twenty-nine dollars and twenty-five cents. Thus the first month has passed; our expenses have been fully met, the rent paid, and some cash in the treasury."

In July, thirty-five dollars and twenty-five cents were received, besides several donations of clothing, a barrel of crackers, a ham, a basket of cakes and fly papers.

August 2d. Three dollars in gifts of one each. 3d. Two dollars, one dollar, and five dollars. 6th. Two dollars and fifty cents; also five dollars received at the door without a name. On the 7th, a valuable present was sent to the Home, which has proved most serviceable. Twelve dollars and a half were given, to be applied to the purchase of a medicine chest, which a druggist in the city gratuitously supplied with bottles and medicines. The whole amount given this month was ninety-seven dollars and fifty cents, some of which was especially designated for rent. Also received, besides the medicine chest, one dozen handkerchiefs and children's cards, rice and sugar, six night dresses, two gutta percha cloths, currant jelly, eight bars of soap, and some clothing, cabbage, potatoes and beets, four night dresses, six aprons, cucumbers, cantelopes and herring. This month, a physician residing at the Hill kindly offered his services without charge. His coming at this time was particularly providential, as there was severe illness in the house, and his practice has been attended with success.

The names of the donors to the Home have been purposely withheld, the publication of them being incompatible with the spirit of the institution, although, whenever known, they are recorded in the private accounts. The ear of our heavenly Father alone hears the want, and its supply is received as coming directly from Him. It is very deeply felt that a testimony for Jesus, his faithfulness in performing the promises of his written word, and his reward of faith in Him, is perhaps a more important object of the institution than the physical protection and care of its inmates. God has chosen to make the one the channel of expression for the other. His children derive their life from Him, and the more intimately they associate Him in all their thoughts, with outward transactions as well as inward experiences, the more vigorous will be their Christian life. It is a blessed thing to depend literally on God for daily bread; it brings the soul very nigh to the "Giver of every good and perfect gift."

"September 2d. A donation of five dollars. On the 4th, three

dollars. This was a time of great need; the funds were not nearly sufficient to meet our urgent wants. We had said, "God has a way unknown to men of providing for his children," and our faith did not waver. In the evening a lady came out from the city, bringing us ten dollars; five her own gift, and five from a lady who had never visited our Home, but who had been deeply impressed to give this amount to Bethesda."

"The Lord seems to have laid it heavily upon the minds of both these persons to give these donations at this time."

"On the 28th, five dollars were very much needed; faith was looking for and expecting it. Two ladies called, seemed much interested in the children, brought them cakes, and left without our having the money we needed. In a few moments the bell rang; another lady walked in, and sat down in the hall; asked for one of the ladies of the Home, to whom she handed a five dollar note. Just the sum required. She left immediately, without giving her name."

"God supplied bountifully this month. Money received, sixty-one dollars; some stockings and pants from a friend, muslin from another, and two dresses, four skirts and a basket of vegetables from a third."

One day after the middle of October, the weather being cool, one of the ladies of the Home remarked, "If we only had some hoods, to take the place of sun-bonnets, the children could still take their daily walk." In the afternoon of the same day, a lady came out from the city, bringing some hoods. As the sister who had particularly felt the need, received them, she said, "How the good Lord does provide us with just what we need! I wonder if there are fifteen." She untied the bundle, and counted fifteen, just the number of the children who had been deprived of their walk for want of them.

Winter was coming on. Many friends of the Bethesda, who had resided at Chestnut Hill during the summer, had returned to the city. The friends of the sisters who had charge of the institution, repeatedly told them the winter would be very trying. The rent was high. The cold weather would necessarily increase the expenses. Times were very hard. Fears were entertained that they would suffer; and they were advised to decrease the family. In reply to this advice they write thus:

"God has taught us to have faith in himself. When human streams are apparently cut off, our faith is being perfected in God. He has always means to supply his children, that are

entirely hidden from human sight; and, 'though outward circumstances change, and there are wars and rumors of wars, and famine and pestilence are abroad in the land, God changes not; his storehouse is ever full; and they that truly trust in Him shall never be confounded.'

Fifty dollars were again procured from the Dawson estate, for the Home, by a lady in Germantown, who interested herself particularly for it. A lady whose means are not large felt it her duty to give one hundred dollars this month, to be applied to the rent. Whole amount of money received in October, two hundred and fifteen dollars and fifty cents. Also, some gingham and aprons, one box and several smaller donations of clothing, a cloak, some toys, two flannel wrappers, two saeks, and some knit woolen stockings.

Once or twice, in November, pressing need was felt. It had been the custom to close up all accounts weekly on Saturday; but the close of the week came, and there was not money enough on hand to discharge them all. "We retired for prayer, and told our heavenly Father just what we needed, confident that we should suffer no lack. Not long after, a mother who had a child with us, for whom she paid some board, brought us nine dollars."

On the following Saturday, again being without sufficient funds to close the week satisfactorily, while in the very act of prayer, two dollars were brought in. This was not quite sufficient, and on the next day, the Sabbath, five dollars were given, which supplied the necessity.

Again, on the third Saturday, there was some deficiency in the treasury; and again, before leaving the room of prayer, a sufficient amount was brought. The amount given in November was thirty-one dollars.

December 19th. "To-day we were in great necessity; but, while in prayer, were assured that God *was providing* for our need. It is our habit to send to the Post office in the morning, but to-day it had been forgotten until evening, when a letter was brought from there, directed simply to 'Bethesda Home.' It enclosed a five dollar note from a gentleman who had never visited our house, and whom we had never seen."

Rent was again due this month, and the month had nearly closed without any apparent provision for it; but there was an assurance that God would provide. Late on Saturday afternoon, the same friend who had felt it her duty to provide for the rent in September, came to the Home. She said, "I have come every step of the

way in faith, God has made it so clear to my mind that I must come." But that our faith might be perfected, she did not mention what she had brought with her until just before her departure, when she gave one hundred and twenty dollars, the whole amount for the rent. This daughter of Jesus did not give of her abundance, but, like the widow who cast her two mites into the treasury, she gave her all. It cost her a struggle, yet she felt she must obey the voice of God; all she had was his, and she felt she was not permitted to lay up treasure upon earth. This is her true riches—to have faith in God, a knowledge of his voice, and a willingness to obey. She is obeying the Lord's counsel through St. John: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich."

The little ones were well remembered by the friends of Bethesda at Christmas; and pies and poultry, cakes, candies, dolls and toys, were sent by several donors. There were also received a sofa and a stove, several dozen pairs of stockings, some knit socks for the infants, shoes and several other articles of clothing. Amount of money received in December, one hundred and eighty dollars and fifty cents.

The number of children taken at the Home previous to the removal to Chestnut Hill, was fifty-one, of whom fifteen had died. Many of these were brought to the house in almost a dying condition, and lived but a few days; some were the victims of heartless or ignorant mothers, who would not return to their children at the proper time, frequently staying away for several days. It was a great trial to lose so many infants during the first six months of the work, and the conclusion had almost been reached to accept no more of such tender age. But after the removal to the country, the health of the family very much improved; and there have been no deaths since the first month or six weeks after coming to Chestnut Hill, up to the last of December, 1861.

The family averages from fifty to sixty inmates, all looking unto God to be fed; and their supply is bountiful. The work of the house is performed by the mothers of the children, who are always provided with a home, while their children are under the care of the institution, until they can find a more profitable situation. Some mothers have as many as five children in the house, but generally only one or two.

And thus God raises up in one place and another testimonies of his power and the truth of his word, that they who trust in Him shall never be confounded. Francke's Mission House in Germany,

the Orphan House of George Muller in England, the Bethesda Home here in Philadelphia, all witness to the power of faith, that those who believe not may be left without excuse. God will vindicate the truth of his word, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." (1 John iii. 22.)